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Little Designer in Theoryland: A Designer-centric Approach to Understanding Theory

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This paper sets out the argument for a more proactive design thinking dialogue between designers and theoreticians, to improve the interface between theory and designers' tacit creative practice. To illustrate this problem, it will focus on Peirce's pragmatic semiotic theory of Semiosis, and how designers and Peircean semioticians are beginning to address the barriers around complex theoretical language. The metaphor of a Semiotic Rosetta Stone will be used to demonstrate the central argument for a development of more designer-centric dissemination of theory. Its argument will be supported by historical precedent of the use of a meta-language to bridge between the known and unknown. Such a designer-centric meta-language would refocus complex theory without 'dumbing down,' and help designers who are unschooled in theory to implement it more easily into their design practice, to enhance the effectiveness of visual communication design. An emerging international Semiotic Rosetta Stone network of designers and Peircean semioticians will be explored, and its roots will be mapped to the ground work of others. Outreach work with designers from 2018-19 will be discussed, especially the use of qualitative tools (such as a semiotic probe) to begin mapping designers' tacit language to Peircean terms. The paper will then conclude with a call for more designers and theoreticians to further collaborate to build models on how theory can be applied to design practice. This would afford more freedom of movement within each other's disciplinary territories of *Designland* and *Theoryland*.

Keywords: *design thinking; Peirce; theory; Semiosis; visual communication; design*

1 Introduction

There seems to be two lands out there - *Designland* and *Theoryland* - and the inhabitants of each land seldom appear to have dual citizenship. In Winsor McCay's classic 1920s strip Little Nemo in Slumberland, Little Nemo famously had fantastic dreams from a vivid imagination, which are then lost when awakening back into the here and now of a daily reality. The here and now reality of design thinking, when designers implement theory into design practice is not easy. Designers and theoreticians do not speak the same language, but designers need to understand relevant theoretical paradigms and research methodologies (applicable to whichever field of design they are engaged in) before they can utilise theory within their design practice.

So, if designers (especially visual communication designers such as illustrators and graphic designers) are to actively apply theory to improve their design practice and outcomes, then it

has to be beyond a superficial level of understanding. But what if designers don't have any formal education in theoretical paradigms? How do they begin to take on a theoretician's specialist knowledge while a designer? Design school education specialises in teaching the design practice, and designers leave university with degrees in their chosen practice. When theory is taught it is obviously not at levels that theoreticians are taught at.

Psychology is taught in psychology faculties, philosophy in philosophy faculties, etc. While these students major in their chosen specialisms, they may choose (or be assigned) a minor module from another faculty to expand their specialist knowledge into broader contexts. Designers, who identify their knowledge grounding as 'tacit' honed through a studio-based environment of practical work, learn through doing. To designers (who may never have had any formal classes in theory at design school) theoretical language can be impenetrable. So, how can designers implement more theory into their design practice, if they first cannot understand the specific terminology of the theory?

Theoretical frameworks that are useful to improving design practice are not sufficiently disseminated in designer-centric language. This paper will explore in three coherent steps this elephant in the design studio. Theoreticians are steeped in their relevant theoretical framework, and designers are in their specialist design discipline. To contextualise the issue it will focus on how the pragmatic semiotic theory of Semiosis (Peirce, 1931-34) can enhance visual communication design, if its dissemination can become more designer-centric for designers and illustrators. From a designer's perspective, although Peirce's theory is of a practical use to enhancing visual communication with design solutions, the complexity of his language to explain Semiosis is a barrier for non-semioticians to understand it. Peirce employs very specific words (most of which he invented) in formulating his semiotic theory of signs. He approached his theory as a logical, pragmatic problem, and so it is not written with future designers in mind.

Finally, the paper will conclude with current collaborations between designers and theoreticians engaged in a more concerted dialogue, to develop new frameworks on how to disseminate theory into a more designer-centric dissemination without dumbing down. It frames this collaborative work in exploring a meta-language between high theoretical language and the tacit language of designers, by using the metaphor of a Semiotic Rosetta Stone.

2 The Elephant in the Design Studio?

Theoretical language is, by its nature, complex and often very specific. It can intimidate non-theoreticians. Whether a designer can implement a theory that could enhance their design practice is contingent on if they first can understand the theory. It is unfeasible to expect qualified designers to gain a second university degree before they can. This paper will explore the concept of developing a designer-centric meta-language to interface between the precise language of theory and designers' own tacit knowledge - "a knowledge we cannot tell" (Polanyi, 2009, p5).

Polanyi defines tacit knowledge by four aspects: the functional, the phenomenal, the semantic and the ontological (2009, p13). Designers use design techniques and craft learnt from the design education they received to create design outcomes that 'works,' because they learn that those techniques can be successfully applied to any design problem they have.

Tacitly this is described as 'knowing what' (*wissen*) is to be done, which then leads to 'knowing how' (*können*) it has been achieved.

Polanyi explains this as the functional aspect of tacit knowledge, a proximal relationship between what needs to be designed and how the solution is designed. This is the phenomenal structure of tacit knowledge. Visual communication designers understand that one thing (designing) leads to another (the solution), but they feel they cannot suitably communicate why it works beyond the tacit level of understanding. The semantic aspect of tacit knowledge is when the meaning of what has been designed is "displaced away from" the designer, and placed into the audience's power to make sense of it.

The designer may not deem it important to be able to explain how their final design solution works beyond knowing what needs to be designed (*wissen*), and 'designing it' (*können*) so that it solves the design problem. Even if the designer cannot theorise how the design outcome actually works, the process of designing is grounded a theoretical gestalt even if they do not realise it. Poyner has described graphic design as having had a long "aversion to theory" (2003, p10), but in the practice of visual communication design designers apply colour theory, ethnography, semiotic communication, etc. The relationship between design thinking and doing, has implications and opportunities for improvements to existing design practice. The reality is that for designers who wish to research and apply new theoretical paradigms to enhance and inform their practice, have to learn the relevant theory without formal education.

Matthews and Brereton state that "the field of design research is a marketplace of methodological diversity" (2015, p151), but design practice is not the same as design research. So, to avoid the conflation that practice IS research, Frayling (1993) provided three approaches to design research as a useful guide for both design researchers and practitioners. To quote Frayling directly, so as to establish the original context for his proposition, he named research as either being (a) INTO art and design, (b) THROUGH art and design, and (c) FOR art and design. But Friedman (2008) correctly cautions that Frayling derived his thesis for these three design research approaches from Herbert Read's earlier work on teaching art and design. Friedman argues that the teaching of art and design practice is the root of the confusion for "those who have come to believe that practice is research" (Friedman, 2008).

So, with a more careful reading of Frayling it can be argued that design research INTO, THROUGH and FOR design goes further than just a tacit understanding 'knowing how' to design. This approach to design research is also concerned with understanding the 'why' of how design works. This brings designers into the thorny issue of having to applying theories and methodologies that they have had very limited education in. It is very rare that theoreticians become designers, so more concerted dialogue between theoreticians and designers is needed to frame theoretical dissemination from a more designer-centric position. The complexity of theoretical languages to designers is a barrier, as it is like learning a completely new language before theory beginning to understand how to effectively apply it.

For designers to be able to explain the 'whys' of their design outcomes with any clarity through theory, this interface between theoreticians and designers is crucial. One current attempt at such an interface between theory and visual communication design practice, using the metaphor of a Semiotic Rosetta Stone, is framed within the philosophical

framework of Pragmatism, and Charles Sanders Peirce's pragmatic form of semiotic theory called Semiosis (1931-34).

Pragmatism as a philosophy was founded by Peirce in late 19th century America, predicated on a Pragmatic Maxim at its heart that meaning is dependent upon the experience of understanding. In Pragmatism, meaning emerges through engagement with the effects of the task or problem (Thayer, 1989, p48). From a design perspective, Pragmatism as a practical philosophy provides many framework possibilities for designers from a variety of design disciplines. Moszkowicz describes pragmatics as "the immediate spatio-temporal location of the object of design" (2009, p200). She describes Pragmatism within graphic design's contemporary scene, based on her own reading of Lupton, as "a basic opposition [in] itself, between Postmodern and/or poststructuralist design, and pragmatic or functional design (...) as an effective and responsible model of practice [keeping] in touch with 'real life' situations (Lupton paraphrased in Moszkowicz, 2009, p62).

Pragmatism and Semiosis can bring designers into a self-discursive communicational situation (Frascara, 2004, p13) to understand how their intended audience will experience their design outcomes (Wood 2016). This philosophy has impacted on design since the 1930s. Moholy-Nagy had applied a pragmatic pedagogy to his New Bauhaus School design curriculum, to imbue his design students with a sense of responsibility in their own learning (Findeli, 1990).

3 A Designer-Centric Theory of Semiosis

The paradox of how designers can follow and apply theory, if the complex theoretical language has never been formally taught to designers at design school, is crucial to address. This is the elephant in the design studio. Theory first needs to be learnt and understood by designers, before they can begin applying their chosen theoretical framework into enhancing their design practice. The complexity of theoretical languages is alien to non-theoreticians like designers. Peirce's pragmatic semiotic theory of Semiosis is one example out of many theories that can positively enhance design practice. This paper acknowledges that not all theories applicable to designers are as obfuscated as Peirce is (e.g. colour theory has clearly benefitted designers by being explained in more designer-centric language). But, this it will not spend time listing theories that need designer-centric dissemination, its intent is to use Peirce's Semiosis as an example of this larger issue. By discussing Semiosis and design, this paper is a provocation for designers and other theoreticians (from any theoretical framework) to develop more accessible dissemination for design practitioners.

Semiotics is one of the underlying theories that inform effective visual communication design, but semiotic theory has two diverging theoretical forms that designers can follow. From their design school class, designers can probably identify Semiology - Saussure's structuralist form of semiotic theory that Barthes later developed. This employs the understanding that semiotic signs signify meaning through the code of Signifier | Signified. It takes into account the object (concept) of the communication within a sign and how it communicates. The second school of thought is a pragmatic semiotic theory called Semiosis, which was developed by Charles Sanders Peirce (1931-34). Coincidentally Peirce developed his Semiosis in the US at the same time as Saussure was developing his Semiology in Europe.

Peirce's pragmatic semiotic theory details the sign-action, or semiosis, of a semiotic sign through a three-way (triadic) relationship. This is a determination flow (see Figure 1)

between the concept (*Object*) to be communicated, the form its representation (*Representamen*) takes in communicating the concept, and finally how the concept is finally interpreted (*Interpretant*). This encapsulates Peirce's Pragmatic Maxim that understanding is an emergent act (Atkin, 2016, p51), as in Semiosis the interpretation of a sign is just as important as the concept or its representational form.

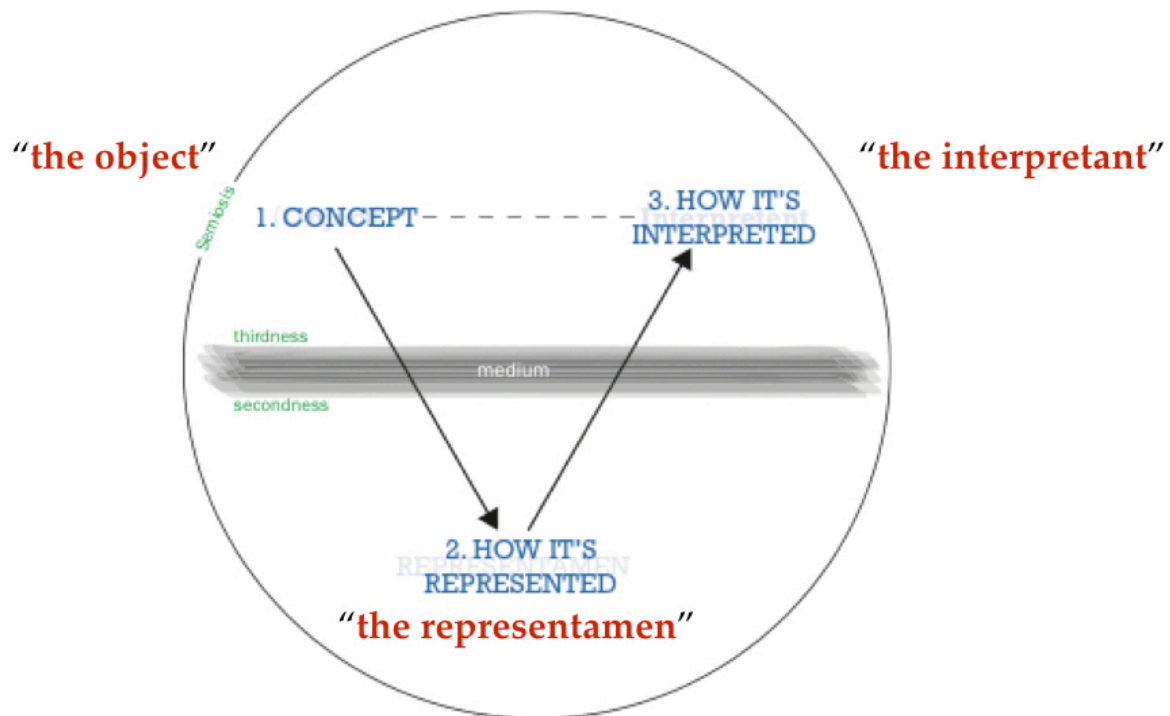


Figure 1. The determination flow in a semiotic sign between an Object, its Representamen, and its Interpretant.

In 1903, Peirce classified ten ascending classes of semiotic signs (Peirce, 1932, [CP 2.243-254] pp142-146) ranging from the simple to the complex. It is within the action between these dynamic inter-relationships of the *Object*, its *Representamen* and *Interpretant* that each sign communicates meaning. The *Object*, *Representamen*, and *Interpretant* are further defined by three ascending classifications of complexity. An *Object* has three classes of an *icon*, *index* or *symbol*; a *Representamen* - *qualisign*, *sinsign*, *legisign*; and an *Interpretant* - *rheme*, *dicent*, *law*. This hierarchy ascends from its lowest immediate communicational form of familiar qualities, through to proposed dynamic connections to actual things, and up to agreed socio-cultural meanings.

When Peirce defined his ten sign classes in the early 20th century he was clearly not speaking to future designers. In just three terms he loses the attention of designers, and this is the tip of the problem. Once he then begins to explain how each triadic relationship works within a sign-action, his theoretical language then continues with a whole new lexicon of terms which are alien to the tacit language of designers. His three sets of new three new terms (*icon*, *index*, *symbol*; *qualisign*, *sinsign*, *legisign*; and *rheme*, *dicent*, *law*) need further unpacking for designers. Some of these nine new terms have other denotations in design contexts (*icon* and *symbol*), while most are totally unfamiliar to non-semioticians (as Peirce created some of these term names).

For the uninitiated designer approaching Peirce, there are currently no entry level readers aimed at designers. Unlike Saussure's binary code of Signifier | Signified, pragmatic semiotic theory is a triadic relationship. What Peirce is describing is the relationship in a semiotic sign between the concept to be communicated as a sign, is dependent upon the concept's representation to be successfully interpreted. Peirce calls the concept to be communicated as a semiotic sign the *Object*. Peirce uses the term *Representamen* to refer to the representation of the *Object*, and *Interpretant* for how it is interpreted. The represented form the semiotic sign takes must identify it as a sign to be interpreted, and so the *Representamen* is also interchangeably used to describe the semiotic sign itself.

As can be seen by this description of the very basic mechanics of a pragmatic semiotic sign, complexity emerges very quickly, which needs 'unpacking' into a design context. Already, in order to briefly explain this pragmatic sign-action to a designer reading this paper, it has been necessary to use more familiar tacit terms such as concept for *Object*, representation for *Representamen*, and interpretation for *Interpretant*. As with any new ideas, there are always issues with unfamiliar terms that need to be first understood, terms that are gateways into the deeper knowledge, understanding, and eventual application into practice. Within this introduction to Semiosis, the first three gateway terms used by Peirce are already off-putting to non-theoreticians. Then when taking the next step in understanding how each of these triadic elements operate, that complexity of language gets more obtuse for designers.

Designers enjoy the manipulation of metaphors within visual communication design, and Roderick Munday developed a suitable metaphor to describe Semiosis (Chandler, 2007, p31). Paraphrasing Munday, Chandler describes a labeled opaque box to explain the triadic relationship of sign-action. This opaque box catches our visual attention from how it appears to us (the semiotic sign's representational form). This representational form tells us it's a 'box' and we sense that the box is not an empty container, that there is an object inside (the concept) we cannot yet see or yet understand. The label on the box helps us to form a mental image of the object in the box (the interpretation). If we do not understand the label from our socio-cultural reference points then the semiotic sign fails to communicate successfully, but if the label is attuned to our references we can interpret the concept from just looking at the 'box.' In this act of interpreting, the sign's representational form (the 'box') visually communicates the concept, but only if the designer employs socio-cultural references. These references pragmatically help the interpreter to understand that 'the box' means something more than just 'the box.' By interpreting what is visually represented, the 'hidden' concept emerges from the act of interpreting the semiotic sign.

This box metaphor is useful to begin to visualise the sign-action in a semiotic sign between a concept, its representation and its interpretation. It presents a complex concept and translates it into terms that non-semioticians can understand. Many designers who have embraced Peirce's Semiosis into their design practice first encountered him during doctoral research. The Interaction Design discipline is a good example of how pragmatic semiotics is being applied to design practice. But beyond academic literature, it is still not yet entering the mainstream of entry-level design literature in a designer-centric way. Peircean semioticians, such as Tony Jappy in his 2013 book *Introduction to Peircean Visual Semiotics*, have begun to explain Semiosis to a wider readership. These inroads towards a more non-theoretician dissemination are welcome, but they can and should go deeper for designers if theoreticians and designers collaborate more. The Semiotic Rosetta Stone collaboration is examining how designers' tacit language can connect with Peirce's theory to create a meta-language that

communicates without over-simplification its rich theory into rich practice. In the next section this collaboration will be placed into a historical context of scholarly precedents.

4 A Semiotic Rosetta Stone

This paper argues for a new approach for dissemination of theory beyond the tacit of 'knowing what' (*wissen*) to design, and then 'knowing how' (*können*) to achieve it, to bridge the relationship between *thinking* and *doing* in design. It will now discuss how an emergent research network of Peircean semioticians and visual communication designers are using a Rosetta Stone approach to develop such a designer-centric dissemination.

The original Rosetta Stone was found buried in the deserts of Egypt in 1799 (Sole and Valbelle, 2002). On this stone stele three languages were engraved. At its top, the arcane and complex hieroglyphics of ancient Egypt were carved. At its base was Ancient Greek, and on the central carved area of the stone, was a demotic script (a simplified priestly version of hieroglyphics used in later religious contexts). The 18th century scholars could only read and understand Ancient Greek, no-one could read hieroglyphics, and they were aware of the demotic script's legacy. It wasn't until they realised that the stone's Greek message was also written in the middle demotic script. With this realisation, they broke the demotic script and then used it as a bridging language to unlock the hieroglyphic language of Ancient Egypt. After millennia, the knowledge of Ancient Egypt was opened up to the modern age by employing the demotic script as an interface between what was already understood (Ancient Greek) and the obscure (hieroglyphics).

The important lesson to take from this historical example is that a high and arcane language (hieroglyphics) could be unlocked and understood by scholars, through an interface of a 'meta-language' with a language that THEY already used (Ancient Greek). So, by taking inspiration from this historical event the metaphor of a Semiotic Rosetta Stone for the emergent collaboration between Peircean semioticians and designers follows a similar path. By trying to read Peirce directly, designers find the language Peirce uses to be as inaccessible as Ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics. But if his theory is first approached from the tacit language of design practice that a suitable model of designer-centric theoretical dissemination can develop.

This emergent Semiotic Rosetta Stone collaboration between Peircean semioticians and designers is built upon the grounding that others have laid (even if these progenitors do not currently explain Peirce in designer-centric meta-language terms). Cohn, in his book *The Visual Language of Comics* (2013), simplifies some Peircean terminology in order to clarify the theory's application within graphic novels. In *Peirce: A Guide for the Perplexed* (2013) by Cornelis de Waal, his language is clearer and he succeeds to a degree in helping the lay reader to understand the tenets of Peirce's doctrine of signs. But as his primary readership are not visual communication designers, the structure of his exposition of Semiosis still requires designers to extract from the theory what may be relevant to their design practice – which requires knowledge.

More recently Atkin (2016) continues this emergent academic trend of clearer exposition of Peirce's pragmatic philosophy using clearer language. But what is clear is that semioticians cannot write directly for designers without the active participation and collaboration with designers. Pragmatism as a philosophical model, through Peircean semiotic theory, can facilitate designers' enhancement of the effectiveness of their practice. Through beginning

with the designers' tacit knowledge (their 'Ancient Greek') a deeper level of visual communication in the design outcomes can be crafted to meet the expectations of their target audience. The pragmatic framework of Semiosis, if understood more easily through clearer dissemination, can be utilised to inform 'how' exactly design decisions can communicate concepts at a deeper, more connotative levels. Unlike in the historical example, this Semiotic Rosetta Stone collaboration has now to define the bridge between Peirce's Semiosis and tacit design knowledge, as the designers' demotic script has not been devised yet. This paper will now outline the initial research between semioticians and designers to influence a future designer-centric dissemination.

5 Toward A Design Meta-Language

Some of the existing groundwork in integrating Peircean semiotics into design practice has been made in the United States. This is not surprising as Peirce is an American philosopher and Pragmatism is an American philosophy. Tom Ockerse's work in "bringing to light methods for perceiving the mechanisms of meaning in visual communication design" (RSID, N.D.) is important to focus on. His groundwork 40 years ago identified some of the issues that needed attention for designers within a Peircean framework, especially the relationship between *thinking* and *doing* in design. In his co-authored paper "Semiotics and Graphic Design Education" (Ockerse and van Dijk, 1979) he detailed the use of Peircean semiotic theory with graphic design pedagogy at Rhode Island School of Design. This paper also references his co-author's Master's thesis *The Role of Semiotics in Graphic Design* (1978). In this thesis van Dijk proposed a system of semiotic design pedagogy which recognised that "factors of sign production, type of representation, and degrees of sign complexity [led] to an overly complex model of continuously shifting nodes of expression." He concluded that this theoretical complexity was not useful to daily design practice, "nor would it clarify much in educating graphic designers" (van Dijk, 1978, p146).

Ockerse's pedagogy at Rhode Island School of Design in the 1970s, is a rare example of attempting to integrate theory into design practice within design education. Other examples of design educators bringing Peircean theory into their curriculum of course exist. One important recent contribution to a more designer-centric dissemination of Peirce's semiotic theory has been in Scotland, at Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design in Dundee (DJCAD). Shaleph O'Neill, in his book *Interactive Media: The Semiotics of Embodied Interaction* (2008) provides case study examples of how Peirce was integrated within DJCAD's Communication Design curriculum. He continues to teach Peircean semiotics to DJCAD design students each year, embedding theory into their future design practice.

It is safe to say that these pedagogical interventions into curricula are designer-led, where designers filter the theory into design practice. As Ockerse and van Dijk's work illustrates, in doing so they highlight areas where theory and practice do not synthesise neatly. In van Dijk's thesis, he concludes that:

*"Peirce's model of classification, with its added subdivisions, thus far takes adequate care of the immediate needs of graphic designers. **This does not mean that the question of classification is resolved.** Graphic designers should be open to new approaches and continue to test the current model. It is still a question, for example, whether there exists a true indexical graphic sign. The selected rules or operations of formation and transformation identified thus far are sketchy and tentative"* (van Dijk, 1978, p142).

Forty years later, the “immediate needs” of visual communication practice from Peirce’s classifications of sign-action have seen very little progress toward a designer-centric literature until very recently with Steven Skaggs’ book, *FireSigns: A Semiotic Theory for Graphic Design* (2017). Skaggs, a typographer and Professor of Design at the Hite Art Institute of the University of Louisville, has spent over a quarter of a century exploring semiotics in design contexts. In his book’s epilogue he states that,

“semiotics, as it specifically applies to graphic design, has been largely undeveloped [...] A semiotics that flows from the concepts first put forward by C. S. Peirce is particularly well-suited for the purpose. [...] But this work is only a beginning.” (Skaggs, 2017, p231).

Skaggs is right in stating that more books are needed to do Peirce’s theory justice within a visual communication design context. Peirce has a global reach to designers beyond America, but any examples of good practice of integrating theory into design thinking are like islands within design education and literature. While all the above examples are designer-led, some Peircean semioticians are also keen to see more integration of their work into design practice. There is currently an emergent international dialogue between designers and semioticians, that is leading toward fresh collaborations to address a designer-centric dissemination of theory.

The timely development of an emergent Semiotic Rosetta Stone international network of like-minded visual communication designers and semioticians, is exploring models for a more designer-centric dissemination of theory. Australian semiotician Cathy Legg believes that this fresh collaborative approach to put Peirce’s Semiosis into practice, “is so much what [Peirce] would have wanted” (Legg, 2018). Professor Paul Cobley, a UK-based Peircean semiotician, observes that it “ties in with a fair amount of endeavour [from theorists] which is certainly happening across Europe as well as in South America” (Cobley, 2018). With the design focus of this outreach being on the visual communication within designing, it places illustration firmly within the designer-centric aims of disseminating Peirce. US-based semiotician Elka Kazmierczak appreciates this unifying factor in reviving Peircean theory to benefit creative practice, as in her experience “it is uncommon to see this unifying approach among designers who do not have experience as illustrators” (Kazmierczak, 2018). These collaborations between Peircean semioticians and the design community, are firstly focusing on the design community to map out its tacit terminologies that describe sign-action. Through practical designer-focused theory workshops using qualitative data-gathering tools such as semiotic probes (see Figure 2), designers’ current understanding of Peirce and the tacit language around understanding semiotic theory is being mapped. This will aid the Peircean semioticians to understand the disconnects between theory and practice, and to bring *design thinkers* and *thinkers interested in application of theory* together.

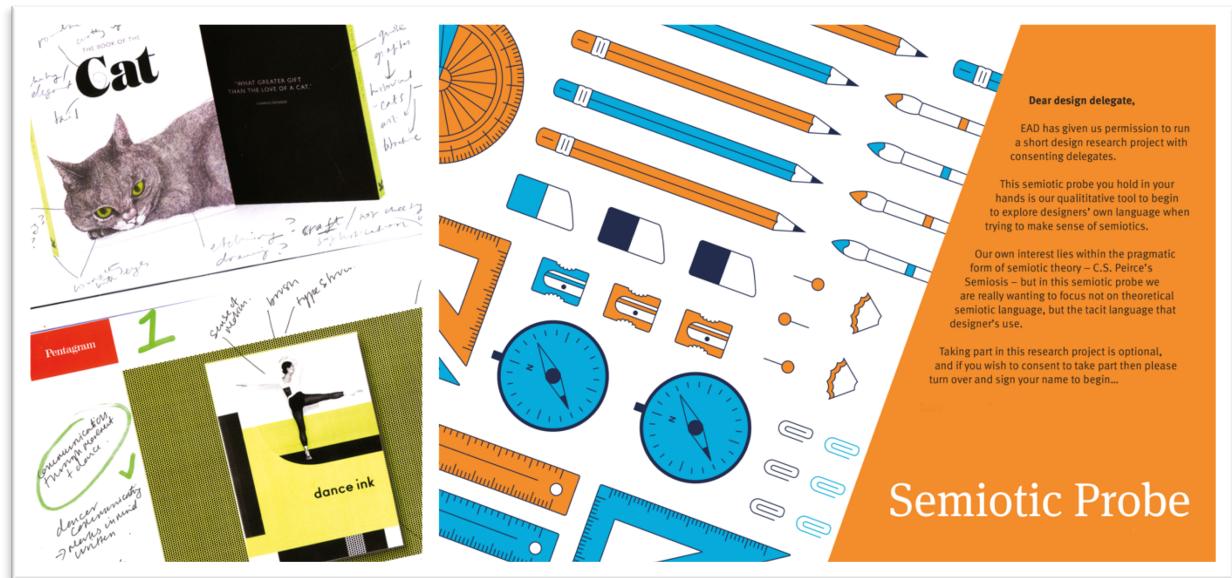


Figure 2. Examples from 2018-19 of Semiotic Rosetta Stone workshop qualitative tools.

This ongoing research through the informal Semiotic Rosetta Stone collaborations, will inform the discourse with theoreticians as to where a new meta-language to help designers connect theory to practice is to be developed. The Semiotic Rosetta Stone approach is intended to become a research framework around which theory and practice can interface in more meaningful ways for design thinking. By embracing a pragmatic approach, the collaborations that emerge to develop a more designer-centric dissemination of theory, follow Peirce's own Pragmatic Maxim. By considering the context of design practice when conceiving new designer-centric dissemination of Peirce's Semiosis, designers and theorists' conception of Peirce emerges through engagement with how theory interfaces with practice. This will result in inhabitants of both *Designland* and *Theoryland* embracing a freedom of movement within each other's disciplinary territories, and in doing so they can experience the perspectives and nuances pertinent to a smoother model for design thinking.

6 Summary

This paper has outlined the need for theory to be reframed for a more designer-centric dissemination. It not only proposes but demonstrates an emergent model to genuinely facilitate designers' understanding of theory to improve their design practice, through a fresh level of collaboration between designers and theoreticians. Its main argument specifically focuses on a collaboration between visual communication designers Peircean semioticians, to find ways to disseminate the semiotic theory of Charles Sanders Peirce without compromising the integrity of the theoretical language. This is proposed using a Semiotic Rosetta Stone metaphor for a new meta-language. This is more than just a superficial taxonomical substitution of a designer-term for a Peircean-term.

This Semiotic Rosetta Stone metaphor is used to frame where and how designers' tacit way of understanding their own practice can successfully interface with the theory that can improve the effectiveness of that practice. It is also the name of a loose international network of designers and Peircean semioticians attempting to demystify Peirce for non-semioticians. This new interface between *Designland* and *Theoryland* is helping to begin the breakdown of

the complexity of dissemination from theory to practice. It is currently designer-led, but will develop into a collaborator-led area of design research with theoreticians and design thinkers working ever closer within each other's disciplinary territory.

High theoretical language may be precise in differentiating and explaining one theoretical paradigm from another paradigm, but while the language remains the preserve of scholars, it restricts it from becoming applicable by practitioners unschooled in the theory. With the emergent collaborations between visual communication designers and Peircean semioticians that this paper reviews, there can be no fear of design 'barbarians at the gates' of *Theoryland*, ready to smash and destroy theoretical scholarship through bouts of iconoclastic creative anarchy. A designer-centric dissemination that emerges from active discourse and the workshopping of theory, cannot be negatively viewed as an attack on the integrity and rigour of any theoretical paradigm by non-scholars.

The Semiotic Rosetta Stone approach follows a historical scholarly precedent which 18th century scholars took. These scholars, through an interfacing meta-language, unlocked the arcane hieroglyphic language of Ancient Egypt, and enriched the modern world with seams of hidden knowledge. Their approach began with a language that the scholars understood, from which they then used a meta-language to unlock the higher language. Designers can only achieve this by engaging with theoreticians in collaborations, and vice versa. The current designers and Peircean semioticians who are already collaborating under the Semiotic Rosetta Stone metaphor, need to be joined by more designers and semioticians to help define how this designer-centric dissemination is to manifest itself.

This paper began with two lands - *Designland* and *Theoryland* - and although the inhabitants of each land don't have dual citizenship, there certainly is now more freedom of movement between them. The introduction led with Little Nemo's fantastic dreams which are then lost when awakening. It concludes within a new awakening, where the dream of a clearer dissemination of theory for designers is now lingering on into the reality of a designer's day.

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